



Food Animal Initiative

ENVIRONMENTS FIT FOR ANIMALS FIT FOR THEIR ENVIRONMENT

FAI Technical Datasheet S2 - Farmers in control of parasites in sheep - Update August 2005

Nematodes (round worms) are a significant problem for sheep farmers. Unless they are adequately controlled they will cause disease, prevent animals, particularly lambs, from thriving and sometimes result in deaths. They are, therefore, an important factor in sheep welfare and flock productivity.

'the facts.....'

Many programmes used to control parasites rely on prophylactic treatments to kill worms at times when the parasite lifecycle predicts that they are a risk. Worm levels vary from year to year and from flock to flock. This means that the challenge from parasites varies and some prophylactic treatments will mean over or under treatment at certain times.

There is an increasing problem of resistance to anthelmintic drugs (wormers). Some nematodes are resistant to all the major classes of anthelmintic and this is in part due to the widespread use of these drugs. The more that a parasite is exposed to a drug the greater the chances of resistance developing.

The public are increasingly concerned about the use of medicines in food producing animals. Systems which are not so reliant on large quantities of prophylactic medication will better be able to meet this concern and will be able to reduce the costs of buying these drugs. There is pressure on organic farmers not to use drugs and this has led to concerns about their ability to maintain flock health levels.

The level of worm burden in a sheep or a flock can be measured by examining the number of worm eggs in their faeces. This is usually calculated as the number of eggs per gram of faeces. This figure can reliably demonstrate the degree of infestation and will be a more sensitive indicator than waiting for the external signs of disease when damage has already been done.

Laboratory samples cost in the region of £7 each to process and this can become very expensive when samples of faeces from many groups of sheep are taken over a grazing period. Samples are often limited due to the expense an insufficient sampling or mixed samples alone may lead to inaccurate information.



'.... the FAI response!'

FAI uses faecal worm egg counts carried out on farm to monitor parasite levels in the flock (approx 50 per season). This is done using the 'fecpak faecal egg counting (FEC) system' which provides all the necessary equipment along with instruction and training. The technique was developed and is widely used in New Zealand where there have been severe problems with worm resistance.

This equipment allows a picture of each flock and each field to be built up so that wormers can be used strategically if and when they are required. Faecal egg counting can also be used to check that a particular worming medication has been effective and that there are no problems of nematode resistance.

Wormers are only used where absolutely necessary (figures are given for intervention levels depending upon the type of nematode found). A value is that scouring is not automatically considered to be parasite infestation. Limitations are that some lungworms eggs cannot be isolated by this technique and other techniques need to be used if sheep are coughing. The kit cost £700 which means that on our farm with 1000 ewes and their lambs and 100 suckler cows and their calves the cost were recouped in the second year of use.

For further information:

FECPAK International (Ireland) Ltd, PO Box 7077, Milton Keynes, MK13 7YH www.fecpak.com
CBS Technologies Ltd, The Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcester, WR13 6PH (for laboratory faecal egg counting www.cbstechnologies.co.uk)



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